

## Hebrews 4:1-11

### The Christian's Rest

*We which have believed do enter into rest – v. 3*

*I came to convert the Indians* John Wesley wrote in his diary and then continued *but who will convert me?* That's a strange phenomenon isn't it? A missionary who endeavors to see others saved who then acknowledges that he's not even saved himself. On his voyage back to England his lost condition became even more magnified in his eyes when the ship hit a storm at sea and it seemed to Wesley that the ship would certainly be destroyed in that storm and all aboard the ship would perish. John Wesley realized in that instant that he wasn't ready to die and the thought of dying greatly intensified his fear.

In the midst of his heightened fears Wesley couldn't help but notice a group of Moravians on board the ship whose countenances stood in stark contrast to those that were afraid for their lives. These Moravians manifested a remarkable calmness. They weren't petrified or panic-stricken the way Wesley himself was. They were actually at rest even in the midst of a life-threatening storm.

That rest that was so marvelously demonstrated by those Moravians is the Christian's portion in salvation. It's one of the greatest benefits of the gospel. And it's a blessing that is not shared by the world. The world does enjoy a number of blessings from God under common grace but rest is not one of them. If there is one thing that characterizes our present world it would certainly have to be turmoil. I read a news article by a conservative pundit yesterday that was entitled: *The Wide World of Chaos*. The article began by saying *It may be time to start channeling Noah and begin building an ark. The world is a huge mess, and it's getting worse every day.*

The news analyst then goes on to chronicle many of the terrible things that are happening in the world – more nations are on the brink of acquiring nuclear weapons – the globe is warming – the value of the dollar is falling – violence seems ever present – terrorism is rising and morality is sinking.

It's as if the entire world on a larger scale is being tossed to and fro by that storm that John Wesley encountered. One of the things that use to perplex me so many years ago before I became a Christian was that the world seemed irretrievably on a course of self-destruction. I certainly knew nothing of rest. The world is a place that is restless. You see it everywhere and on every level – whether you're talking about a man whose poverty-stricken condition makes him desperate or whether you're talking about a man who has all the toys the world can offer but the world's riches never seem to be enough.

But what I'm wondering this morning is this – Are you able to rest? Are you able to rest when the world is in turmoil? Are you able to rest as violence rises, and our entire culture functions in an atmosphere of uncertainty? Our text tells us this morning that *we which have believed do enter into rest*. Rest is to be the believer's portion and yet the Hebrew Christians being addressed in this epistle were not at rest.

And let's face it – there are certainly times when we, as Christians, are not at rest either. There were times when Paul was robbed of his rest. So we read in 2Cor. 7:5 *For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears.* Isn't that a perfect description of the world today and the thing that robs the Christian of rest? – fightings without and fears within.

And yet the context of that verse indicates very clearly that the absence of rest was a temporary situation for Paul. Once Titus brought him news of how the Corinthians were going on with Christ and still held Paul in high regard Paul would go on to say *Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus; And not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more* (vv. 6,7). Paul gained back his rest and thus demonstrates to us that a Christian should not go long without the benefit of his rest.

And so Paul could write in the words of our text:

*We which have believed do enter into rest.*

I want to look at the subject of that rest this morning. And my aim is for each believer here to know the reality of it – to enter it or re-enter it if need be.

## I. The Nature of This Rest

And the first thing we should note under this point is that this rest could be described as Divine rest. We describe it that way because it's source is found in God and the example of it is also found in God. Note again the words of our text in v. 3 *For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.* Underscore that phrase *my rest*.

This is a repeat of a statement we met earlier back in 3:11 *So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.* And in 3:18 *And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not?* And 4:10 the teaching is the same *For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God [did] from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest* (v. 11).

My rest – his rest – that rest – in all these references Paul is referring to the rest of which God is the source. And when we recognize God as the source we'll also recognize God as the provider of this rest. Here then is a benefit to Christianity that can't be duplicated by false religions or by apostate Christianity. False gods, you see, can't provide what they don't have and false religions can't offer something that ultimately belongs to the true and living and God.

They can offer false appearances of it but it's only a veneer. I can remember during the days that preceded my salvation how impressed I was with the Eastern religions and

especially the things that flowed from Eastern religions – such things as yoga and transcendental meditation. I can still see in my mind's eye a scene that I beheld on a college campus of one of these Eastern mystics sitting on the floor of a gymnasium addressing an audience seated in the bleachers. His feet were crossed and his hands were raised and the things he said didn't make any sense. I'm sure, in retrospect, that he embraced some form of philosophy that in Western culture would be viewed by and large as irrational – but maybe that was the problem with Western culture from his point of view. We're too rationale. But the thing that made this man so appealing was not his nonsensical answers to questions but it was the fact that he appeared to be rested and at peace.

I'm convinced now that it was a veneer or a shallow physical effect more often than not induced by drugs. I think one of the reasons that drugs and drink are so deeply entrenched in our culture is because in our culture you have scores of men and women and young college age kids that are in pursuit of rest or peace.

The thing I want you to see from these verses, therefore, is that true rest and the peace that comes from true rest must be found in God. And it must be found in God because God is the One and the only One who is at peace. God is at peace with all that He's done. He's at peace with His creation and so we're told in v. 4 that *God did rest the seventh day from all his works*. And He's at rest in His work of redemption. In 1:3 Christ is seen as seated at the right hand of God, having purged our sins.

We know, don't we, that the things we encounter in this world can make us anxious and can at times even bring us to the brink of despair. You and I may be found pacing the floor at times wondering what's going to happen, agonizing about what the end of all these things will be. What's in store for Christians who are witnessing increasing hostility toward the ways of God? What kind of a world will our children have to face? We're not sure how to describe it but we seem certain, don't we, in saying it's going to be much worse than the world we grew up in or that our parents grew up in. And when these foreboding thoughts come to dominate our thinking then we begin to reason as David does in Psalm 55:5,6 where he writes: *Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me. And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest.*

Spurgeon refers to this escapist mentality as a vain desire. He writes *We are all too apt to utter this vain desire, for vain it is; no wings of doves or eagles could bear us away from the sorrows of a trembling heart. Inward grief knows nothing of place.*

I can't help but wonder, though, how many Christians harbor this kind of desire and view it as the solution to their anxiety. I need to escape. I need to move further away from people – further away from the city – away from the government – away into greater isolation from everyone and everything. The fact that they are also moving further away from the church and therefore from the means of grace associated with the church doesn't seem so disturbing to them – they simply need to get away, so they reason.

The thing we have to come to appreciate, therefore, is that the source for our rest is found in God. Our text says it is His rest. And if it's found in God then our external circumstances can never rob us of our rest. Christ, the source for our rest, could Himself rest in a ship in the midst of a storm as well as He could rest on a soft mattress with a pillow and a comforter had those things ever been His portion.

And the reason Christ could so rest was because of the assurance He had that His Father was well-pleased with Him. *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased* the Father could say of His only begotten Son. And because of His acceptance with His Father Christ could be at rest. He could be at rest in the midst of an ungodly nation that would reject Him. He could be at rest even when He was engaged in debate with those whose only aim was to catch Him in His words.

I think it would be fair to say that there's only a single instance where we find Christ robbed of His rest and that would be the time that led up to and included that season of time when His Father forsook Him in order that you and I might never be forsaken by God.

Our rest, you see, could be further described as the rest that comes from the gospel. It's not only God's rest but it's gospel-rest. Look at what we read in v. 1 and the beginning of v. 2 *Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached...*

And what does the gospel convey to us but that Christ's rest, grounded in His Father's acceptance of Him, becomes our rest because we are joined to Christ. If God is well pleased with His Son then He's well pleased with you and with me. If God accepts His Son then He accepts you and me in His Son. If He sees His Son as righteous then He sees you and me as righteous in His Son. And if Christ has completed the work that is necessary for our salvation then there's nothing for us to do but to rest in that completed work.

I think the best description of rest in this chapter is found in v. 10 *For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God [did] from his.* Our rest, you see, calls us to cease from our own works as a means to gaining God's acceptance. This is not to say that there's no place for Christian works – it is to say that our works flow from our rest because we rest in the glorious truth that we are accepted in the beloved. We need not strive to earn anything from God because what we would strive for has been freely given.

And so gospel-rest leads us to rest in God's love and God's grace. Gospel-rest enables us to even rest in God's justice because Christ has fulfilled the law for us in its precept and penalty so that our salvation becomes the just or the righteous thing for God to do. Here is a rest, then, that can enable you to keep your sanity when the world seems to be so insane. Here is a rest that can be your portion when the storms of life are reeling and the uncertainties of life drive others to despair. Here is your rest, when the nation in its ignorance adopts political courses of action that you can plainly see are detrimental to the

well-being of the nation. You and I rest in the One who rules over all, who has and will advance His cause and will, in the end, bring this entire world into subjection to Himself. We rest in the One who has purged our sins and delivered us from the bondage of the fear of death and the dread of hell. What a blessed rest is our portion!

The question that naturally arises is this: If this blessed rest is our portion then why do we go through long seasons where this rest seems so far from us? And that leads to my next consideration. We've seen the nature of this rest how it's a Divine rest found in God and it's gospel-rest, grounded in what Christ has accomplished. Consider with me next:

## II. The Means to This Rest

Notice again the words of our text in v. 3 *For we which have believed do enter into rest.* The thing that was robbing the Hebrew Christians of their rest was the absence of faith. Our rest cannot be experienced apart from faith. And what was happening to the Hebrew Christians is something that happens to many Christians today. They walk by sight rather than faith.

Like Peter walking on the water to meet Christ – they become distracted by the storm and then begin to sink. About 6 months ago before we began our studies in this epistle I preached a sermon from v. 11 which exhorts us to *labor to enter into that rest.* In the course of that study I pointed out that because we have to labor to enter this rest indicates to us that we meet with forces of resistance when it comes to the matter of our rest.

Spiritual warfare, in other words, must be engaged in for us to enter the realm of our rest. We know so well, don't we, how strong the temptation can be to walk by sight rather than faith. We feel that we're face to face with the discouraging political developments in our land. We see these things every day in the news – if you muster enough courage to read or watch the news.

And to those who draw from the less than common sources that you feel are more trustworthy when it comes to news – the things you gain from such sources only tend to magnify your discouragement. How often have you ever gone to a more obscure news source and then concluded the situation in our country isn't as bad as you thought it was?

We're well aware of the ungodliness of our culture and it's bent against Christ. And for some people these circumstances strike even closer to home. We can read and watch the news and still feel that it is distant from us – but when layoffs are announced in the place where you work then all of a sudden it's very close to home. And in that instant the things of Christ can for a moment become mere abstractions and the things you confront in the world become the only reality that you know.

This is what was happening to the Hebrew Christians and that's why Paul makes such an earnest plea for faith. We saw it two studies ago when we noted that phrase *hold fast. Hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end* (v. 6). *We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end* (v. 14).

And on the other side of the issue is the exhortation to take heed – *Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.*

Could I remind you, therefore, that you must fight a battle for your rest and you must labor to enter it and in the course of that labor you must exert yourself to overcome unbelief and any and all the things that press upon your mind through carnal sight. You need, as we saw last week, to preach to yourself and impress upon yourself that although the things that are eternal are unseen things they are, nevertheless, real things. You have not followed cunningly devised fables when you came to Christ. He is true and He is real and He is seated in the heavenlies and you are joined to Him. Don't let anything you see with the carnal eye – be it ever so foreboding or ever so sweet – don't let anything distract your spiritual vision from the reality of Christ or the gospel of Christ.

Let me remind you also that unbelief is a sin against God. Unbelief can only take you in one direction and that is away from God. The verse speaks of *an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.*

And so we must fight the battle for faith – we must labor against all resistance to cultivate our faith. The failure to do so will result in forfeiting our rest. *For we which have believed do enter into rest.*

And so we see the nature of our rest – it's divine rest and it's gospel rest. We see the means to our rest. We must exercise faith in Christ. We must utilize the means of grace in order to cultivate our faith. This means time in the word of God and time in prayer. It means time in church, availing yourself of every opportunity to be exposed to the means of grace.

Could I leave with you finally:

### III. The Ministry of Rest

I made reference earlier to 2Cor. 7 which shows us an instance when Paul himself was anxious and was not in that blessed condition of rest. 2Cor. 7:5 *For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without [were] fightings, within [were] fears.*

The contrast to rest is being troubled. The word *troubled* means to be pressed. What a graphic picture appears to us, then, of Paul's condition of anxiety. Paul was pressed from fightings without and from fears within – Two sources contributing to that pressure.

And the thing that contributed to Paul's deliverance from this trouble was the coming of Titus. 2Co 7:6 *Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus.* Notice from this statement that the comfort comes from God but the means God used in this case was Titus – and not just Titus but the Corinthians themselves. So we go on to read 2Co 7:7 *And not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more.*

You see a chain, as it were, which consists of the links of the believers at Corinth who were then linked to Titus and comforted him and then Titus in his comfort or in his rest ministered at last to Paul and became the God-given means of bringing Paul back to his state of rest.

Doesn't this demonstrate to us that as believers we take on the task of not merely tending to our own rest and comfort but we take on as well the task of ministering this rest or comfort to our brothers and sisters in Christ. It becomes far less challenging to walk by faith when we see others who are walking by faith. Among believers faith in Christ becomes contagious.

And don't we know that there are times when one Christian is up while another is down – or one family is up while another is down – or one church may be up while another is down. The means to pulling up the ones that are down and discouraged is by showing them the love that springs from your faith.

Nobody is exempt from such a ministry – not the great apostle Paul himself. He needed the consolation that came from God through the ministry of other Christians. And now in this epistle to the Hebrews he is endeavoring to bring the restless Hebrew believers back to the realm of their rest.

And the way Paul endeavors to execute that ministry is to warn them of the awful direction they were headed. He warns them of what the ramifications would be regarding their spiritual condition if they allowed unbelief to lead them away from Christ and away from the gospel of Christ.

But he also accomplishes his aim by making much of Christ. This is the practical benefit to all these comparisons that we find in Hebrews. If Christ is greater than the angels and Christ is greater than the prophets, and greater than Moses and greater than Aaron and the Levitical priests – then we can rest in His merit and we can be at rest no matter how hostile and ungodly the world becomes.

And so I wonder this morning as we bring our meeting to a close – are you resting in Christ? Are you leaning on the Everlasting arms? Are you basking in the glorious truth that your sins are washed away and your guilt is all gone? Is the testimony of the hymn-writer your testimony who wrote:

Jesus I am resting, resting, in the joy of what Thou art. I am finding out the greatness of Thy loving heart. Thou hast bid me gaze upon Thee, And Thy beauty fills my soul, For by Thy transforming power, Thou hast made me whole.

And if I could cite the second stanza it has bearing on our text – Oh, how great Thy loving kindness, Vaster, broader than the sea! OH, how marvelous Thy goodness, Lavished all on me! Yes, I rest in Thee, Beloved, Know what wealth of grace is Thine, Know Thy certainty of promise, And have made it mine.

Underscore that phrase – know thy certainty of promise. Verse 1 tells of a promise of entering into His rest. I hope and pray this morning that you have made that promise of rest your own.